

The Problem on Correspondence between Parts of Speech and Parts of Sentence in Chinese

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§0 In recent years, the viewpoint is prevalent in Chinese grammar field that there does not exist Correspondence between Parts of Speech and Parts of Sentence (CPSPS) in Chinese. By querying the opinion, this paper puts forward its own point.

§1 Arising of the problem

1.1 It is Mr. Zhu Dexi who first definitely put forward the viewpoint. When talking about the specific features of Chinese in his work **Questions and Answers on Chinese Grammar**, Mr. Zhu said: "In Chinese, there does not exist the simple correspondence between parts of speech and parts of syntax (i.e. parts of sentence)." [1] The statement itself is quite right, because it does not deny the CPSPS in Chinese, and only denies the simple CPSPS. However, it is not true in fact. Mr. Zhu further explained the implication of the statement:

" (1) Verbs & adjectives can act as subject and object; (2) Nouns can act as attribute; (3) Adjectives can act as predicate and adverbial; (4) Nouns can act as predicate under certain conditions." [1] Here, each item has no additional requirement except the fourth ('under certain conditions'). That is to say, Mr. Zhu thought that the first three situations can exist in Chinese without any requirement. Therefore he has changed the implication of "there does not exist the simple correspondence between parts of speech and parts of syntax (i.e. parts of sentence)" , and his real meaning is to deny the existence of the CPSPS in Chinese.

1.2 The viewpoint has had a certain influence on Chinese grammar field, and recently some scholars have written it into college textbooks.[2]

§2 In theory, the viewpoint is difficult to stand

2.1 First we will ask: "What is the object in classifying parts of speech?" Mr. Zhu once said: "It is for the convenience of teaching grammar that we classify parts of speech." [3] This opinion is quite reasonable. Grammar is the rules to combine words into sentences. Classification of parts of speech can reflect the syntactic functions of words and can contribute to summarizing the sentence structural patterns. So it gives a great convenience to carry on the grammar teaching and studying and to explain grammar clearly. It is thus clear that just because different parts of speech have different syntactic functions, the

classification of parts of speech is of significance. If we deny the CPSPS in Chinese, what is the advantage of classifying parts of speech?

2.2 It is Mr. Zhu's opinion that the distribution theory of Structuralism is the criterion for classifying parts of speech in Chinese, which has been adopted by the majority of grammarians in China up to now. The so-called grammatical distribution of a word is, Mr. Zhu explained, "the sum of grammatical positions a word can occupy" [1] (i.e. the grammatical functions of a word we usually called). It includes two aspects: (1) The ability of a word combining with others; (2) Syntactic functions of a word. Both aspects provide basis for classifying parts of speech in Chinese. If we deny the CPSPS in Chinese, it means that the classification is mainly based on the first aspect and the second is eliminated. Then results of such classification will not be of any help to show the syntactic functions of words and we doubt if it has any value in syntax.

2.3 Scholars holding this view can not justify themselves in theory. For example, how to treat such phrases as '生活的提高' (raising of living standard) and '政策的正确' (correctness of policy)? They think that in these two phrases the head words are still verb and adjective respectively, but the whole phrases are nominal. If asked how to know this, they will answer that these phrases can only act as subject or object in a sentence. Well, don't they admit the correspondence between properties of phrases and parts of sentences? On the one hand they admit the correspondence between phrases and parts of sentence, on the other hand they deny the CPSPS in Chinese. Thus they inevitably fall into a self-contradictory position.

§3. Discuss from the point of linguistic facts

3.1 The author of the paper has investigated the syntactic functions of 1066 adjectives collected in the work **Dictionary on the Use of Adjectives**. [4] The results are as follows (listed in the order of the number of adjectives acting as different parts of sentence):

parts of sentence	of	attribute	predicate	object	complement	adverbial	subject
number	of	1046	1019	954	892	489	327
adjectives							
proportion		98.12%	95.59%	89.49%	83.68%	45.87%	30.68%

This table shows that adjectives can indeed act as all kinds of parts of sentence. Then can it be an evidence to prove that there does not exist the CPSPS in Chinese? The answer is "no". Because this table can only show the number and proportion of adjectives that can act as each part of sentence, but can not reveal the different requirements for adjectives to act as different parts of sentence. By comparison, the latter is more important for us. Because only when acquiring the different requirements of different parts of speech acting as

the same part of sentence and of the same part of speech acting as different parts of sentence, can we distinguish between generality and individuality, ordinary cases and special cases, and can we determine whether the CPSPS in Chinese exist or not.

3.2 To explain the problem briefly, here we only compare the situation that nouns act as subject and object with that verbs & adjectives act as the same two parts of sentence. Owing to lack of morphological changes in Chinese, verbs & adjectives can really act as subject and object. But it is different from the situation of nouns which is free and absolute. As long as semantic meaning and language custom permit, nouns can act as subject and object without requirements and without restrictions on the predicates or predicative verbs. As far as verbs & adjectives are concerned, they can act as subject and object only under the specific grammatical environment. For example, when they act as subject, it is required that the predicates or the head words of the predicates must be adjectives, judging verbs, imperative verbs or must have auxiliary verbs before them. These requirements are very strict. When they act as object, it is required that the predicative verbs must have the meaning of beginning, stopping, appearing, psychological process or must be judging verbs or titular verbs. Though, the requirements for acting as object are less strict than those for acting as subject, they can, after all, impose restrictions on verbs & adjectives that act as object. From the statistics above, adjectives that can act as object are really a lot, but they all require the specific predicative verbs. Therefore it is certainly less free for adjectives to be used as object than for nouns. In short, it is the specific conditions that make it possible for verbs & adjectives to act as subject and object. Without these conditions, verbs & adjectives can not occupy these two positions. This shows that compared with the situation that nouns act as subject and object, it is special cases that verbs & adjectives act as the two parts of sentence.

3.3 Though we only compared the different requirements between nouns and verbs & adjectives when they act as the same two parts of sentence--subject and object above, it is enough to show our viewpoint. As to other situations that they act as other parts of sentence, we will discuss in another paper.

§4 Our viewpoint

4.1 On the whole, parts of speech and parts of sentence in Chinese roughly correspond to each other. But the correspondence is different from that of Indo-European language family. The main differences between them are as follows: Nouns correspond to subject and object in Indo-European language family, but to subject, object and attribute in Chinese; Verbs correspond to predicate in Indo-European language family, but it is verbs and adjectives that correspond to predicate in Chinese; Adjectives correspond to attribute in Indo-European language family, but to attribute, predicate, complement and adverbial in Chinese. Moreover the correspondence in Chinese is not very strict so that some exceptions are in existence. But the exceptions can only exist

under certain conditions. For example, that nouns act as predicate and verbs & adjectives act as subject and object are two cases in point .

4.2 If we base the viewpoint that there does not exist the simple CPSPS in Chinese on admission of CPSPS , it accords with Chinese reality and therefore is right. But if we only pay attention to the superficial phenomena that the CPSPS in Chinese does not exist and neglect the different requirements of different kinds of correspondence, we will inevitably confuse generality with individuality, ordinary cases with special cases. AS a result, the fact that parts of speech and parts of sentence in Chinese roughly correspond to each other will be denied. Of course such view is wrong.

4.3 In early days, the Chinese grammar books of our country copied English grammar, believing that there existed the simple CPSPS in Chinese. Nowadays, in order to explore the specific features of Chinese, some scholars completely deny the CPSPS in Chinese. Both of them are extreme points and one-sided.

Annotations:

1. Zhu Dexi . 1985 Questions and Answers on Chinese Grammar.
Beijing: The Commercial Press.
2. Qian Nairong . 1990 Modern Chinese .
Beijing: Higher Education Press
3. Lu Shuxiang, Zhu Dexi. 1954 Lectures on Chinese Grammar and Rhetoric.
Beijing: Chinese Youth Press.
4. Zheng Huaide, Meng Qinghai. 1991 Dictionary on the Use of Adjectives.
Changsha: Hunan Press.

The End